SELF-DISCOVERY AMID COLONIAL EDUCATION AND MATERNAL AUTHORITY IN JAMAICA KINCAID'S *LUCY*

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Abstract

This paper examines Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy *(1990) as a narrative of self-discovery shaped by the intersecting forces of colonial education, maternal authority, and displacement. Focusing on the psychological and cultural experiences of Lucy Josephine Potter, the study explores how her identity formation emerges through resistance to imposed systems of knowledge, gendered expectations, and cultural belonging. Drawing on postcolonial and feminist theoretical frameworks, the paper identifies three interrelated dimensions of Lucy's self-discovery. First, it analyzes Lucy's rejection of colonial pedagogy, particularly the memorization of Eurocentric canonical texts, as an early act of intellectual resistance against epistemic domination. Second, it examines the mother-daughter relationship as a symbolic site where patriarchal and colonial values are transmitted and contested, highlighting Lucy's refusal of maternal authority as a crucial step toward psychological autonomy. Third, it investigates Lucy's experience of migration to the United States, where racial and cultural marginalization complicates rather than resolves her search for identity. The study argues that Lucy neither assimilates into the host culture nor nostalgically clings to her homeland; instead, she reconstructs identity as a dynamic and oppositional process grounded in rupture and non-assimilation.*

Keywords

Self-Discovery; Colonial Education; Maternal Authority; Postcolonial Identity; Female Agency; Diaspora; Jamaica Kincaid

Introduction

Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990) is commonly viewed as a multifaceted approach to the issue of identity, displacement, and self-discovery. It is a story of a nineteen-year-old Caribbean female, Lucy Josephine Potter, who migrates to the United States to serve as an au pair in a rich white family that lives in America. The novel is written in a confessional and self-reflective manner and is not exactly a linear story of assimilation but a psychological examination of alienation, opposition to the world and objective definition of self. In its essence, the novel represents the lives experienced by most postcolonial subjects, between legacies left behind by colonialism and the dislocating realities of the diasporic existence.

As the story of Lucy, Kincaid questions the hegemonic discourse of belonging and identity formation by preempting a female protagonist who is an active agent against colonial, patriarchal, and societal norms. The novel breaks the belief that displacement always results in integration or reconciliation, but rather, it introduces identity as an ongoing struggle, a negotiation process and a process of reinvention too. The experience of Lucy proves that selfhood does not exist in predetermined categories but is produced through resistance, disruption, and redefinition.

As a study of resistance and self-identification, the present research attempts to analyze how Lucy rejects colonial education, challenges maternal and patriarchal control, and her bargaining of diaspora displacement as a shaper of her identity. In addition, it contends that Lucy is a representative of the larger plight of postcolonial subjects- and particularly women- in forging identities that are not colonial and diasporic alienation. The discussion of the novel as a method of self-discovery makes the study relevant to the current discourse on intersections of colonialism, gender and migration. Thus, it shows that Kincaid, in *Lucy*,

challenges traditional paradigms of identity and belonging, as the self-hood in the postcolonial world is not granted or inherited but formed and rebelliously constructed.

Research Objective

1. What are those ways through which Lucy rejects the influence of colonial education, social, and parental roles to know herself and make an independent identity in *Lucy*?
2. Why does Kincaid depict societal role and maternal care as external forces, and consider unassimilated response to them as a way to Lucy's self-realization in the novel?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. It brings to the surface the ways through which one can reach self-realization. This study talks about how the self is realized amid the influence of different forces. The peculiarity of this study is that it shows that colonial education is not only working as an external force to shape one's identity, but the societal and parental roles are also external to deprive individuals from self-realization. This study has shown that for self-realization, external forces, in whatever form, should be neglected. This research has shown the ways through which Lucy has realized her own, as an independent self. It shows that the novel challenges the intricate mechanisms of identity formation in the postcolonial period, which provides a point of view anticipating resistance, autonomy, and psychological complexity. In this study, the researcher has tried to show how individuals settle the tension between cultural displacement and individual autonomy, and found through the journey of Lucy that demonstrates that selfhood is created out of disruption, opposition and rebranding. This paper emphasizes the concept of female self-discovery, which is frequently associated with breaking the bonds of tradition and gendered roles and family demands, by concentrating on the confrontation between Lucy and the maternal influence and cultural functions. Her story provides the idea about the universal search for belonging and independence in the global world that is connected and disconnected simultaneously. Overall, the present research puts *Lucy* in the context of a personal story of self-discovery and a timely contribution to the global discussion of the issue of colonial traces, gender, and diaspora.

Literature Review

Self-discovery is the process by which individuals get to know more about themselves, their identity, emotions, values, beliefs, desires, and purposes. This usually entails introspection, doubt, and readiness to face their past, their surroundings and their relationships to discover who they really are, not necessarily what society wants them to be or what their parents or relatives expect them to be. Self-discovery is usually presented in the literature as a voyage of a character, often brought about by conflict, displacement, or transformation. It is not only about discovering who a person is, but also how he becomes the way he is, through those experiences that change his worldview.

Self-discovery is the reflective and experiential process by which individuals gain insight into their identity, values, and purpose, enabling authentic self-understanding and self-direction. Debarati Saha's (2021) study situates Jane Austen's novels within the broader discourse of female identity formation in a rigidly structured social world. The discussion reveals that Austen does not portray identity as fixed or inherited; rather, it is shown as a process of self-discovery achieved through introspection, moral reflection, and emotional maturity. The heroines of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Sense and Sensibility* negotiate between social expectations like marriage, class decorum, and gender roles with their inner desires, judgments, and ethical values. It has been diagnosed that Austen presents self-discovery as

impossible without engaging society, yet equally impossible without resisting its pressures. True individuality emerges not through rebellion alone, but through moral purification, the willingness to recognize personal flaws and correct them. Her vision of individuality is moral rather than radical, as her heroines gain independence by learning how to think rightly, judge fairly, and act responsibly. Identity is shaped through error, reflection, reform and individual growth is not achieved by rejecting society entirely, but by redefining one's place within it on ethical terms.

The Quest for Self-Discovery: A Study of the Journey Motif in The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf *by Kahf and* The Translator *by Aboulela*, Ahmad and Rahman (2020) argue that the motif of physical and emotional journey plays a central role in the protagonists' processes of self-discovery and the movement across geographical, cultural, and ideological spaces allows the female protagonists to confront internal conflicts related to faith, identity, and belonging. These journeys are not merely physical movements but transformative experiences that foster introspection, resilience, and self-awareness. Both protagonists redefine their identities beyond imposed social and cultural constraints, suggesting that self-discovery emerges through continuous movement, reflection, and negotiation between personal desire and communal expectations. Psychologists have analyzed the psychological development of characters in J.R.R. Tolkien's works, applying frameworks from developmental and analytical psychology. For instance, Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* has been interpreted through the lens of the heroic journey and Jungian individuation, as he encounters multiple challenges that test his courage, morality, and self-understanding (Martin, 2018). Through these trials, Bilbo's transformation reflects a movement from comfort and conformity toward self-actualization.

Self-discovery is a recurring developmental pattern in literature, wherein a character progresses toward the realization of personal identity in opposition to external forces such as family, culture, patriarchy, or colonial power. *Lucy* by Jamaica Kincaid exemplifies this trajectory of self-discovery through its first-person narrative, which effectively captures the protagonist's evolving sense of self. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) observe, postcolonial literature frequently foregrounds characters' struggles to rediscover and redefine themselves in the aftermath of colonial disruption. In *Lucy*, the protagonist's rejection of colonial education and her critical interrogation of Western values function as pivotal moments of awakening and self-awareness. These acts mark Lucy's conscious resistance to inherited colonial ideologies and signify the beginning of her self-making process. The narrative, therefore, can be read as both an act of rebellion and a reconstruction of identity. Feminist critics further emphasize the emotional and psychological turmoil Lucy endures during this journey, highlighting how her quest for self-discovery is inseparable from her resistance to patriarchal authority and restrictive gender norms. Through this intersection of postcolonial and feminist concerns, *Lucy* presents self-discovery as a complex process of psychological emancipation and cultural renegotiation.

Paravisini-Gebert (1999) interprets the strained relationship between Lucy and her mother as an allegory of the protagonist's struggle for personal agency. From this perspective, Lucy's growing autonomy represents not merely an act of personal rebellion but a rejection of patriarchal expectations, maternal authority, and inherited colonial values, marking a significant stage in her quest for selfhood. Similarly, Boyce Davies (1994) emphasizes the role of geographical displacement in intensifying Lucy's process of self-examination and identity formation. Removed from her familiar environment, Lucy is forced to confront cultural alienation, which propels her toward deeper self-awareness and identity reconstruction. Furthermore, Bost (2003) argues that Lucy's self-discovery is not a fixed or linear process but one characterized by continuous motion and transformation. Through love,

friendship, memory, and writing, Lucy repeatedly renames and redefines herself, privileging conscious acts of resistance over inherited identities. Her experience underscores the multipolar nature of identity formation and highlights the complex negotiation of colonial history, gender relations, and diasporic displacement. Drawing on these critical perspectives, this study examines how Kincaid constructs *Lucy's* self-discovery amid colonial education and maternal authority.

Fanon (1952) focuses on the mental impacts of colonization, especially the inferiority of the colonized subjects as an internalized anomaly. This view of decolonization as self-liberation is in line with the idea of decolonization presented by Fanon through the rejection of her colonial past by Lucy. On the same note, Said (1993) discusses orientalism and cultural displacement, which are manifested in the migration of Lucy and her feeling of being an exile. Bhabha (1994) develops this further with his hybridity theory, whereby the changing identity of Lucy is placed in the third space within which she does not readily assimilate and merely negotiates her identity between her Caribbean roots and life in America.

Motherly authority also contributes to the struggle of Lucy to achieve independence. Hirsch (1989) claims that the mother of Lucy represents colonial authority, which supports the denial of expectations of Lucy. Savoury (2002) goes further to state that the detachment of Lucy is her severing of ideologies imposed on her, and the fact that she did not reply to the letters written by her mother is her claim of independence. As Paravisini-Gebert (1999) emphasizes, sexual freedom and disobedience to the accepted female gender role can act as one of the factors that lead to self-realization in Lucy. Franco (2005) and Tate (1998) place the same study in the rejection of the prescribed gender roles by Lucy in the wider context of feminist struggle in Caribbean literature.

 Language is an important element in the identity formation of Lucy. The language that has been defined by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) is the place of resistance of postcolonial subjects, whereas Nair (2010) believes that such a direct, unsentimental narrative style that Lucy employs is her way of asserting agency. Philosophically, the idea of Otherness by de Beauvoir (1949/2011) is very close to the struggle of Lucy against the norm of patriarchy, whereas the notion of gender performativity by Butler (1990) highlights the fact that Lucy does not want to subscribe to strict gender divisions. Lucy had broken memories and a poor maternal relationship, which, in the psychological state of her mind, is a concept by Freud (1920/1955) of repressed trauma. According to Freud, childhood trauma experienced and left unresolved comes out in adulthood in the form of unconscious repression and determines identity and lack of emotion. This burden is depicted in the repeated memories which Lucy has of neglect and control, and this affects her rebelliousness and quest to define herself.

Research Methodology

The research design adopted in this study is a qualitative research design, based on the examination of the selected novel's text. The study is set to investigate the themes of self-discovery amid colonial education and maternal authority. Instead of producing numerical data, the study aims at interpreting meanings, symbolic representations, and power relationships, which are entrenched in the text.

The postcolonial theory is used to understand the remaining impacts of colonial education and cultural domination on the subjectivity of Lucy. Besides that, the feminist approach is also brought into practice to shed light upon the gendered aspects of Lucy's struggle, that how the influence of the motherly authority and male dominance has been overcome.

Analysis and Discussion

Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* foregrounds self-discovery as a conflicted and painful process shaped by the intersecting forces of colonial education and maternal authority. Lucy's psychological journey reveals that the formation of self in a postcolonial context is not achieved through physical displacement alone but requires a conscious confrontation with the ideological structures internalized since childhood. Her migration to the United States marks the beginning of this struggle, placing her in what Homi Bhabha (1994) describes as a *liminal* or *in-between* space, where identity is continuously negotiated rather than securely possessed. The British curriculum imposed on Caribbean children demands emotional and intellectual allegiance to an imperial culture that denies their lived realities. Lucy's resentment toward memorizing Wordsworth's *"Daffodils"* reflects her awareness of this epistemic violence. The poem represents not merely an English landscape but an enforced worldview that marginalizes her own environment and history. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) argue, colonial education functions as an instrument of ideological control by producing subjects who internalize imperial values at the expense of indigenous identity. Lucy's rejection of this curriculum thus becomes an early step toward self-recognition—a refusal to allow her consciousness to be shaped by narratives that exclude her experience.

Lucy's mother, whose authority extends beyond the domestic sphere into the ideological realm insisting on obedience, discipline, and respectability mirrors the values promoted by colonial rule or a localized continuation of imperial power. Lucy's resistance to her mother is therefore not solely personal but political, reflecting a desire to disentangle her emerging self from inherited systems of control. As McLeod (2010) notes, postcolonial self-hood often develops through the rejection of familial expectations that reproduce colonial norms. Lucy's departure from home and her refusal to maintain correspondence with her mother signify attempts to assert autonomy and claim an independent identity. Memories of home and her mother persist, indicating that the past continues to shape her present. Stuart Hall's (1990) notion of identity as a dynamic process, constructed through ongoing negotiation between memory and experience, illuminates Lucy's condition as one who continually reformed through conflict, nostalgia, and resistance. Her relationship with Mariah demonstrates how liberal goodwill can replicate colonial assumptions and Mariah's failure to recognize Lucy's historical and cultural difference underscores the persistence of Western dominance in shaping narratives of belonging. As Edward Said (1993) observes, postcolonial subjects often remain marginalized within Western frameworks, their identities misunderstood or oversimplified. Lucy's discomfort in this environment reinforces her sense of existing between worlds, intensifying her struggle for self-definition.

Lucy's psychological development attempts to silence her mother by refusing communication, a symbolic act of decolonization. According to Patricia Murray (2013), Lucy's resistance represents a psychological rupture from inherited histories that restrict individual freedom. Silence, as Carine Mardorossian (2005) argues, operates in *Lucy* as an act of agency rather than absence—a deliberate strategy through which Lucy asserts control over her narrative. *Lucy* portrays self-discovery as an ongoing process forged through resistance to colonial education and maternal authority. Lucy does not arrive at a resolved or unified identity; instead, she inhabits a liminal space where selfhood is continuously negotiated. This unresolved condition reflects Bhabha's (1994) conception of postcolonial identity as fluid and unstable. Lucy's journey thus exemplifies the complexities of self-discovery in postcolonial

contexts, where liberation requires not only physical separation but also sustained psychological and ideological struggle.

Through a feminist lens, the mother represents an internalized form of patriarchal conditioning, promoting ideals of female submission, purity, and self-sacrifice that confine Lucy to conventional gender roles. As Sandra Pouchet Paquet (1996) observes, *Lucy* narrates the coming-of-age of a young woman who actively resists the gendered and cultural inscriptions imposed upon her identity. Lucy's rejection of maternal authority thus symbolizes a broader struggle against both familial control and social conformity, positioning her self-discovery as an act of resistance.This rejection is fraught with emotional complexity because she strives for independence, the psychological imprint of maternal authority persists, underscoring the difficulty of fully severing ties with one's past. Her resistance is therefore not only postcolonial and feminist but also existential, marking an ongoing process of self-formation rather than a completed liberation.

Her interactions with Mariah, Peggy, and Paul enable her to test different modes of belonging and detachment within contexts shaped by race, class, gender, and displacement. Mariah initially appears as a benevolent alternative to Lucy's biological mother—warm, emotionally expressive, and seemingly supportive. Lucy briefly finds comfort in this relationship, which contrasts sharply with the emotional distance she associates with her mother. However, as Lucy becomes increasingly aware of the racial and economic power dynamics underlying their relationship, this sense of comfort dissolves. From a postcolonial perspective, Mariah embodies a liberal, maternal form of colonial authority—well-intentioned yet deeply paternalistic. Her gestures of inclusion, such as inviting Lucy on family vacations or treating her "like one of the family," ultimately reinforce Lucy's subordinate position as an employee rather than an equal. Lucy recognizes that Mariah's empathy is limited by privilege; Mariah cannot fully comprehend the cultural loss, historical trauma, and displacement that shape Lucy's identity. Through a feminist lens, Mariah represents the limitations of white liberal feminism, which often overlooks intersections of race and class. Lucy's rejection of Mariah thus signifies her refusal of a feminism that universalizes women's experiences while ignoring structural inequalities. In distancing herself from Mariah, Lucy asserts the necessity of creating a space that reflects her own lived reality.

Lucy's romantic relationship with Paul offers another dimension of her self-discovery. While Paul provides the possibility of emotional intimacy, Lucy resists deep attachment, viewing romantic commitment as another potential form of dependency. From a feminist perspective, Lucy's reluctance to surrender emotional autonomy challenges conventional gender norms that associate female fulfillment with romantic attachment. Her decision to leave Paul reflects her determination to avoid emotional vulnerability that could compromise her independence. Her actions throughout the novel culminate in a decisive moment of self-assertion when she chooses to leave Mariah's household and live independently. This act symbolizes her rejection of imposed structures—colonial, familial, and social—and marks a significant stage in her self-discovery. Her recognition that the future of her life must be self-fashioned affirms her agency and autonomy; but an act of self-creation with refuses to conform the prescribed roles of daughter, woman, or immigrant, instead forging an identity that exists beyond these categories. Writing and self-narration play a crucial role in this process, as Lucy's reflective voice allows her to reclaim authorship over her own story, Her self-discovery emerges as an ongoing struggle against colonial education and maternal authority—a process through which identity is not inherited but consciously constructed.

Conclusion

This article has examined Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* as a sustained meditation on self-discovery shaped by colonial education and maternal authority within a diaspora context. The novel demonstrates that identity formation in postcolonial settings is not resolved through migration but is instead produced through ongoing resistance to inherited systems of control. Lucy's journey reveals how colonial and patriarchal structures persist beyond geographical boundaries, continuing to regulate knowledge, gender, and belonging. Colonial education in *Lucy* operates as an epistemic regime that privileges Eurocentric narratives while erasing local histories and embodied experience. Lucy's refusal to internalize this imposed knowledge marks the emergence of critical consciousness and initiates her movement toward self-definition. Similarly, maternal authority functions as a domestic extension of colonial discipline, transmitting ideals of obedience, moral regulation, and feminine respectability. Lucy's rejection of maternal control thus constitutes a psychological rupture that is central to the articulation of postcolonial female subjectivity.

Migration further complicates rather than resolves Lucy's struggle for autonomy. The United States reproduces structures of racial and cultural marginalization, making assimilation neither possible nor desirable. Lucy's resistance to both nostalgic attachment to her homeland and conformity to the host culture foregrounds identity as a dynamic and op-positional process rather than a stable category. Ultimately, *Lucy* re-configures self-discovery as an act of refusal rather than reconciliation. Kincaid presents self-hood as fractured, provisional, and continually negotiated through resistance to colonial pedagogy, patriarchal authority, and normative narratives of belonging. By doing so, the novel challenges dominant frameworks of migration and female development and offers a critical re-imagining of postcolonial identity as an ongoing practice of autonomy and self-authorship.

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